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July 24, 1961

Memorandum of discussion in the National Security Council on July 13, 1961

Subject: Berlin

The Secretary of State opened the discussion by pointing out that the Khrushchev timetable is not under our control. We might well find that any estimated date of the crisis was too early or too late.

Secretary Rusk pointed out that the essential point in the Acheson paper was that the U. S. was not currently in a good position to negotiate. If Khrushchev were now willing to protect our basic rights, he would not have moved as he has, and willingness to negotiate, on his part, will depend on appropriate steps from our side. The Secretary recommended a decision to proceed immediately in discussion of economic counter-measures in a three- or four-power group. After discussion on this particular point, the President indicated his desire to have a precise program framed for us to put forward. There was discussion of the balance of payments problem, the commodity problem, and the very large role which European countries must play in any economic sanctions. The problem was referred for definite recommendations to the Department of State, the President indicating also his desire that the Treasury play a major part in this problem.

Mr. Achesson (July 17, 1961)
The Secretary of Defense presented the Defense Department's recommended program (annex B of the study of the Interdepartmental Coordinating Group of July 12, 1961). There followed discussion of the desirability of a declaration of national emergency. The Secretary of State indicated his view that such a declaration at this time would have a dangerous sound of mobilization, and quoted from the Acheson paper on the need for keeping early steps in a low key. The Secretary of State proposed as an alternative a Congressional resolution or other action authorizing appropriate military call-ups. The Vice President believed that the response to any such proposal in the Congress would be that the President should take the lead.

Mr. Achesson (July 17, 1961)
Mr. Achesson argued that we must do what is sound and necessary in itself, and not act for the sake of appearances. He believed that if we left the call-up of Reserves to the end, we would not affect Khrushchev's judgment of the shape of the crisis any more than we could do so by dropping bombs after he had forced the issue to the limit. He believed that not much later than August we should wish to begin training soldiers, though

of course they would not all be called up at once. The Secretary of State agreed that the training process should not be left until too late.

There was discussion of the relation of any military preparation to our Allies, and the President requested preparation of a report showing what contribution we would expect from them, to match our own new efforts.

The Vice President asked whether there was provision for procurement of additional aircraft in the submission of the Department of Defense. The Secretary of Defense answered in the negative and explained that the new airplanes could not be obtained in a short time, and that this program was designed to provide immediately needed new strength.

It was agreed that the impact of the proposed defense program would require a review of other Administration programs and a study of such matters as stand-by controls and new taxes. These questions were to be reviewed by the Treasury Department, the Council of Economic Advisers, and the Special Counsel to the President.

There was further discussion in which Mr. Acheson made clear his belief that the President should decide to support a full program of decisive action. The Vice President agreed. Others felt that we should not take action now which might jeopardize the authorization and appropriation for the foreign aid program. The Secretary of State remarked that it will be a great victory for Khrushchev if by a memorandum and a few speeches he could weaken the foreign aid program.

There was no clear decision on these matters, and it was agreed that alternative programs, at different levels of present expenditure, should be refined for further discussion at the next meeting.

In a smaller meeting with the Steering Group after the NSC meeting, there was discussion of a series of four alternatives. The Vice President favored alternative 1. The Secretary of Defense and Secretary of State preferred alternative 2, and General Taylor preferred alternative 3. The President did not make a choice, nor did the meeting lead to any clear consensus on the "political scenario." The President did answer plainly the statement of the Secretary of State that there are two things which matter: our presence in Berlin, and our access to Berlin.

McG. B.